

Spotlight on Mathematics



There are two maths qualifications: GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy. Students have a choice of three tiers of entry: foundation, intermediate and higher.

Each tier has a different set of available grades. Higher tier has grades A* to C available, intermediate tier has grades B to E available and foundation tier has grades D to G available.

Because these tiers overlap (for example grades B and C are available for both the intermediate and higher tier), the exam papers will contain some common questions. WJEC uses these questions to ensure that the level of difficulty to achieve, for example, a Grade C is the same whichever tier a student takes.

Because these tiers only target a small set of the grades, it is important to take care when looking at grade boundaries. For example, on the higher tier paper grades A*, A, B and C are available and roughly a quarter of the questions are targeted at each grade. This helps to explain that in these new qualifications, the grade C has been set at around 20% of the total marks on that tier. However, grade boundaries will fluctuate series on series as exam boards set them each year to reflect the difficulty of the papers.

For more information please see our article on setting grade boundaries.

Who's taking these qualifications this summer?

This summer we have seen some changes to entry patterns, with around 23,000 Year 11 students taking GCSE Mathematics and around 19,500 taking GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy. Entries for both qualifications have decreased compared to summer 2017 (9% decrease in GCSE Mathematics and 4% decrease in GCSE Mathematics Numeracy). This is because some students will have sat in summer 2017 (as Year 10 students) or November 2017 and only a proportion will be returning this summer hoping to improve their grades. However, there will also be students sitting the subject for the first time this summer.

The entry data also shows us that this summer there's a substantial decline in year 10 entry compared to previous years (94% decrease in GCSE Mathematics and 84% decrease in GCSE Mathematics Numeracy). The decrease in entries has been driven by the change to school performance measures which, from summer 2019, allows only a student's first result to count.

Schools can decide when to enter students for exams and there is no single approach that's right for all students. However, it's important that students have covered the content of the qualification to give them the greatest chance of achieving their best possible grade.

What does this mean for the results this summer?

These different entry patterns are likely to impact on the final overall Wales mathematics results this summer. It will be difficult to make meaningful year on year comparisons this summer due to the cohort changes; some students will have achieved their grades in Summer 2017 or November 2017 and won't be taking mathematics examinations this summer. Interpreting and comparing the overall summer results will need to be done carefully.

Our comparisons will be based on the best results achieved by students who are finishing year 11 this summer; this means that if a student got a better grade earlier in the course, that's the grade we'll use for comparison with year 11 results from previous years.

To find out more about these two qualifications please see our [**postcard**](#).



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